

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: April 22, 2010

Meeting No.: 111

Project: UMBiopark - Proposed Replacement PUD

Phase: Master Plan

Location: West Baltimore

PRESENTATION:

Jane Shaab, UMBiopark, updated the Panel on the progress of the Biopark development. Charlie Wilson, of Ayers Saint Gross, then presented the revised master plan and its three primary influences: the UM Baltimore campus, the character of a “biopark”, and the relationship of the master plan to the surrounding neighborhood. His presentation began with an introduction of the eight Urban Design Goals established by the Department of Planning as follows:

- Develop a campus identity and atmosphere for the Biopark;
- Establish a useable open space network that re-enforces the concept of campus and features indigenous landscape plantings appropriate for an urban environment;
- Vary building height and mass, stepping down to meet the adjacent neighborhood scale;
- Create active street frontages on W. Baltimore St. and MLK Jr. Blvd.;
- Establish parking in secondary locations and minimize curb cuts on West Baltimore Street;
- Re-enforce MLK Blvd as the front face and gateway to the campus and the West Baltimore community;
- Continue the existing streetscape guidelines to ensure a generous pedestrian domain of quality paving, maximum tree canopy, appropriate landscaping and public amenities that visually connect with the main UMB campus;
- Consider the impact of future Red Line and TOD locations.

Additionally, Mr. Wilson identified several goals of the master plan as they related to the three influences mentioned above:

1. improve the connections and gateways at MLK Jr. Boulevard and at Schroeder,
2. reinforce the pedestrian realm along Baltimore Street with location of buildings, entrances, open spaces, and streetscape,
3. provide a series of open spaces that create a “heart” to the campus and connect to existing open spaces like Little Lithuania Park,
4. locate uses such as office / laboratories, garages, and retail that relate to the surrounding neighborhood and to the existing Biopark buildings, and
5. create buildings of the scale and size that are marketable and feasible for biotech research as well as the scale of the surrounding neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:

Overall the Panel was comfortable with the land use location, height and massing, and landscape plan components of the master plan. However, there were still several concerns and recommendations that the design team and client need to address:

Location of a “signature” building at West Baltimore Street and MLK Jr. Boulevard. Several Panel members expressed concern regarding the location of this building and suggested that it needed to be set back from MLK Jr. Boulevard so as to continue the treed edge that currently defines the roadway. This opinion, however, was not shared by all members. The Panel also thought that this building could be taller given its location and desire to be a “signature” building.

Open spaces. Concern was expressed regarding the location and size of the two primary open spaces. They appear to be too small to be effective “greens” that help create the heart of the Biopark; they are more “garden-like” in scale. Additionally, they are too similar in size. The design team should consider re-studying the size and nature of these two spaces, how they relate to one another, to Baltimore Street, and the adjacent buildings, and to Little Lithuania Park. Finally, the use and character of the small open spaces in front of the central buildings and at the western end of Baltimore Street were unclear; again, greater clarity would create a stronger open space strategy, which seems to be lacking.

Reinforcing the street edge with trees. Panel members questioned the breaks in the streetscape along Baltimore Street and at MLK Jr. Boulevard, and suggested that the streetscape be treated in a continuous manner to reinforce the connections that Baltimore Street provides to the west and across MLK Jr. Boulevard to the east.

Height of the buildings. Panel members expressed concern relative to tall buildings on the northern edge of the master plan and their relationship to the 2 – 3 story nature of the immediately adjacent neighborhood. Additionally, it was recommended that the building on the southeast corner of Baltimore and Schroeder be no higher than the 75’ (the low number on the range of heights) so as to better relate to the lower buildings in this area. Also, some concern was expressed regarding the height of the new building along Hollins Street – although having the building set back in line with the rowhouses to the east would help to mitigate the proposed height. Finally, it was questioned as to why the tallest building was on the north side of Baltimore Street (nearest to the 2-3 story residential neighborhood), rather than on the southern side of Baltimore Street

“Green” strategy. The Panel appreciates the initial thought given to the greening of the Biopark with its buildings, green roofs, bioretention, etc. and asks that the design team and client continue to push a green agenda as a way to create a model for development in the city.

Finally, a community member from Hollins Roundhouse spoke against the location of a building on the current open space on the northwest corner of Baltimore Street and MLK Jr. Boulevard, as well as concerns with the height and relationship of the new building along Hollins Street.

PANEL ACTION:

Approval withheld. Return with response to comments.

Attending:

Jane Shaab – UMB Biopark

Linda Cassard – UMB

Charlie Wilson, Dana Perzynski – ASG

Susan Williams – STV

Jane Buccheri – Hollins Roundhouse

Kathy Robertson – BDC

Ms. Eig; Messrs. Bowden, Ramberg, Britt and Cameron – Panel

Tom Stosur, Gary Cole, Wolde Ararsa, Brent Flickinger, Bob Quilter - Planning